

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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September 28, 2012

U.S. Global Food Security Program Receives \$1 Billion Pledge.....	1
Secretary Clinton, Burmese President Thein Sein Before Meeting	2
Secretary Clinton Urges Global Support for New Arab Democracies.....	2
U.S. Official Cites Need to Promote Democracy Worldwide	3
Shared Responsibility Is New Standard in AIDS Response.....	4
World Cannot Contain Challenge of Nuclear-Armed Iran, President Obama Says.....	4
Hateful Speech Does Not Excuse Violence, President Obama Says	5
President Obama Vows to Intensify Fight Against Human Trafficking	6
U.S. Welcomes Philanthropists into Development Work	7
U.S., Global Partners Launch Effort to Empower Women	7
World Bank Supports Global Agriculture As Food Prices Spike	8
Violence Is Unacceptable, President Obama Says of Protests	8
U.S. Seeks Greater Engagement at 67th U.N. General Assembly	9

U.S. Global Food Security Program Receives \$1 Billion Pledge

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 27 September 2012

Washington — The Obama administration's food security and nutrition initiative Feed the Future has received a \$1 billion pledge from U.S. civil society organizations, boosting its efforts to address the root causes of hunger and poverty around the world and forge long-term solutions to chronic food insecurity and undernutrition.

Speaking September 27 in New York, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said InterAction, an alliance of 198 U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations "is pledging more than \$1 billion of private, nongovernmental funds over the next three years to improve food security and nutrition worldwide."

She said that World Vision, Heifer International, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children and ChildFund International together pledged \$900 million of the \$1 billion sum, which will help countries transform their agricultural sectors to sustainably grow enough food to feed their people.

Nearly 1 billion people worldwide suffer from chronic hunger, and more than 3.5 million children die from undernutrition every year. By 2050, the world's population will exceed 9 billion, and global demand will require a 70 percent increase in food production.

Food security "is now at the top" of the U.S. national and foreign policy agenda "because we understand that it is a humanitarian and moral imperative, but it also directly relates to global security and stability," Clinton said.

The Obama administration began Feed the Future in 2009 with a pledge of \$3.5 billion over three years as part of its support for agricultural development worldwide. Clinton said that was followed in 2010 with the 1,000 Days partnership program, devoted to improving nutrition from the critical period between pregnancy through a child's second birthday.

In 2011, Feed the Future focused on supporting women in agriculture because they are involved in every aspect of food production, from planting seeds to weeding fields to harvesting and selling crops, but have access to fewer resources than their male counterparts.

For 2012, the initiative is focusing on the role of civil society organizations in the public and private sectors that have "long-standing relationships in communities and valuable expertise" and are constantly working to "make the world a better place for all of us," she said.

Clinton said the U.S. government's strategy is to ultimately work itself out of the need to provide development assistance by empowering countries, farmers and local businesses with the tools to run their own agricultural programs and set their own priorities.

But she said the United States plans to continue to use its resources to help in global emergencies, especially those that are too much for a country to respond to on its own, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

NEW ALLIANCE FOOD PROGRAM EXPANDING IN AFRICA

In New York on September 26, a senior Obama administration official announced that the Group of Eight (G8) New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition program launched in May is expanding from its original partnership with Ethiopia, Tanzania and Ghana to include Mozambique, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

The \$4 billion program, funded by more than 60 companies from Africa and around the world, is creating businesses in seeds, fertilizer, small-scale irrigation and food marketing in local African communities in a manner designed to reach small-scale farmers.

"At the end of the day, this effort is designed to move 50 million people out of poverty and hunger and reduce malnutrition amongst probably more than 15 million children who suffer from chronic stunting," the official said.

The official said that companies that made commitments in May are now reporting on their progress and noted that DuPont had doubled its seed production capacity in only four months, allowing it to provide 32,000 small-scale farmers with improved seeds that will more than triple their production and productivity.

To be part of the alliance, countries need to increase their domestic spending on agriculture to fight hunger; restrict export bans and reduce or eliminate excise taxes on foreign direct investment in the agriculture sector; and enact policy reforms to improve land titling, particularly to allow access for women and families.

Four months into the program, "Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia are all, frankly, ahead of their timelines and schedules in implementing these reforms. We're seeing that that is, in fact, unlocking real progress," the official said.

Secretary Clinton, Burmese President Thein Sein Before Meeting

26 September 2012

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson

REMARKS

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
And Burmese President Thein Sein
Before Their Meeting
September 26, 2012

Waldorf Astoria Hotel
New York, New York

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN: (Via interpreter) (Inaudible) ambassador to the United States (inaudible). I believe that our subsequent meetings have contributed a lot to the strengthening health of our bilateral relations between Myanmar and the United States. And on behalf of the people of Myanmar, we would like to extend our gratitude to Madam Secretary, who has opened a new chapter in our bilateral relations. The improvement of our bilateral relations, we can see that for instance, we now we have the – our diplomatic relations have been at the ambassadorial level.

And the people of Myanmar are very pleased that – on the news of easing of economic sanctions by the United States and we are grateful for the action by the United States. The democratic reform path that we have (inaudible). We still need to continue our path on democratic reforms, but with the recognition and the support from the champion of democracy like the United States, it has been an encouragement for us to continue our chosen path. And I would like to take this opportunity to express my cordial greeting to the President Obama and my best wishes for election campaign. I would personally like to (inaudible) to President Obama.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Mr. President, it's wonderful to see you again, as you say, for our third meeting. I believe we have had productive discussions in Nay Pyi Taw and in Siem Reap, and I look forward to such a discussion here in New York. We have watched as you and your government have continued the steady process of reform, and we've been pleased to respond with specific steps that recognize the government's efforts and encourage further reform.

And in recognition of the continued progress toward reform and in response to requests from both the government and the opposition, the United States is taking the next step in normalizing our commercial

relationship. We will begin the process of easing restrictions on imports of Burmese goods into the United States. We hope this will provide more opportunities for your people to sell their goods into our market. As we do so, we will continue consulting with Congress and other relevant stakeholders about additional steps, while at the same time working with you and supporting those who are hoping that the reform will be permanent and progress will be continuing.

We recognize, Mr. President, that you are doing many things at once – political reform, moving toward a democratic change; economic reform, moving toward greater connection of your country with the global economy; working to end ethnic conflicts as you move toward peace and stability for your country.

So I look forward to our discussion today, Mr. President. Thank you.

Secretary Clinton Urges Global Support for New Arab Democracies

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 26 September 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States “will not walk away” from new democracies created by revolutions in the Arab world, and the international community has a powerful stake in seeing them succeed.

Speaking September 26 at a U.N. Security Council hearing on peace and security in the Middle East, Clinton said the United States rejects “the false choice between democracy and stability” and welcomes the political changes that are under way in the region.

“Democracies make the strongest, most capable partners, and we know that it takes a lot of hard work and oftentimes struggle,” but the establishment of emerging democracies in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya “should be a cause for great satisfaction and hope,” she said.

Even though the citizens of emerging democracies have the most at stake and bear the greatest responsibility for ensuring the success of their revolutions, the international community also must step up as “champions” of their struggle and not be “fair weather friends,” Clinton said.

“Making good on the promise of these transitions will take many hands working on many fronts,” she said.

Supporters of democratic change should heed the lessons learned from the past, including the understanding that “training, funding and equipment only go so far” because “It takes the political will to make hard choices and tough changes that will build strong institutions and lasting

security," she said.

The international community must stand together in support of the common aspirations for security, safety, the dignity of self-determination and "the freedom to live lives according to our own conscience," she said.

The secretary said recent protests directed against Americans and Westerners over an anti-Islamic film "exposed a deep rift within new democracies and volatility that extremists were quick to instigate and exploit."

But Clinton noted that thousands of Libyans poured into the streets on September 21 to condemn the September 11 attacks that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans in Benghazi.

Those demonstrators "made it clear that those who would promote violence and division do not speak for the new Libya, and that armed bands who would sever Libya's ties with the world are not welcome," she said.

On Syria, Clinton said Bashar al-Assad's campaign of brutality "has sparked a humanitarian crisis," and the United States has committed more than \$100 million to help the Syrian people.

The violence must end and "a political transition without Assad must move forward," she said.

As the atrocities in Syria escalate, the U.N. Security Council "remains paralyzed" on the issue, Clinton said, urging "that we try once again to find a path forward that can bring the Security Council forward" to end the violence.

Concerning the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, Clinton said the future "must belong to those who embrace the hard work of peace, not those who thrive on conflict or reject the right of Israel to exist."

The United States "stands ready and prepared to work toward a just agreement" that will accomplish the goal of seeing "a secure Jewish state of Israel" and "an independent, secure, prosperous Palestine" that fulfills Palestinian aspirations, Clinton said.

U.S. Official Cites Need to Promote Democracy Worldwide

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer | 26 September 2012

Washington — As a desire for democratic governance spreads to countries in every region of the world, a gathering of global leaders committed to advancing democracy worldwide heralds "a moment of great importance" for the growth of free societies, says a U.S.

official.

Speaking in New York at the fifth meeting of the Community of Democracies (CD) Governing Council on September 25, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Roberta S. Jacobson, hailed the rise of pro-democracy movements while also acknowledging the difficulties that often accompany transitions to democratic rule.

"From East Asia to North Africa to the Western Hemisphere, we are seeing more and more people stand up and demand to live out their lives in societies where leaders are accountable, civil society is free to flourish and all citizens are subject to the rule of law," she said. "Realizing these goals is one of the defining challenges of our time. And it is a monumental task."

Jacobson pointed to recent actions by the Community of Democracies, an organization founded in 2000 as an intergovernmental coalition of democratic countries aiming to strengthen democratic norms and institutions around the world. Those actions, she said, have produced some promising developments in Moldova and Tunisia, where the CD is sharing expertise and resources to support those countries' transitions to democracy.

"For example, in Moldova, senior officials of the Georgian Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice, working through the CD Task Force, are designing and implementing zero-tolerance policies to help stamp out corruption," said Jacobson.

In addition, the CD has established the LEND (Leaders Engaged in New Democracies) Network, which brings key leaders from the world's newest democracies together with former presidents, prime ministers and others responsible for past transitions to democracy. "The new LEND Network is enabling leaders in new democracies to engage in real-time information exchanges as they work to build strong, accountable institutions and establish rule of law," Jacobson said.

Other CD working groups have vital roles as well. "The Democracy Education Working Group is helping to foster values and champion principles that will sustain our democracies for future generations," Jacobson said. "And the CD's Working Group on Women and Democracy continues to highlight the importance of gender equality and women's rights in countries undergoing democratization."

"As we prepare for El Salvador to assume the presidency of the CD next spring, I am particularly excited about the renaissance of CD activity in the Western Hemisphere," Jacobson said. "From Canada's strong leadership of the Working Group on Defending Civil Society, to Chile's co-

chairmanship of the Poverty, Development and Democracy Working Group, this activity is reinforcing the remarkable trend toward democracy that has occurred throughout the Americas in recent decades."

The Obama administration "is committed to true partnership and shared responsibility in the Americas," she said. "That commitment demands that we be honest in re-examining areas where this hemisphere once led, but [where] we are now faltering. We look to our partners to join us in speaking up whenever and wherever the principles we share in the Americas — like the right to free and fair elections, or freedom of the press — come under attack."

A few decades ago, "the leaders of many of today's leading democracies in the Americas were fighting for these principles against dictatorships in their own countries," she recalled. But "in some countries today, populist leaders impatient with the institutional processes of democracy are closing down or subjugating independent media, courts and other essential components of democracy."

"Today we need to redouble our efforts, and more importantly, everyone must speak out to defend strong, independent institutions of democracy — whether national, regional or international," Jacobson said.

Shared Responsibility Is New Standard in AIDS Response

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 26 September 2012

Washington — Nations that are home to some of the world's worst HIV/AIDS epidemics are also among the countries working the hardest to take responsibility for care of people living with HIV/AIDS, according to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In New York City September 26, she spoke at an event organized by UNAIDS on the fringes of the U.N. General Assembly session.

Clinton hailed the progress toward greater responsibility made by South Africa, which has one of the world's worst national epidemics.

"The government now accounts for about three-quarters of all HIV/AIDS spending in the country," said Clinton. Clinton said South Africa is boosting its goal still higher and will pay for nearly 90 percent of its HIV/AIDS response by 2017.

"So let me thank President [Jacob] Zuma and South Africa for their commitment and leadership," she said. South Africa has an almost 18 percent rate of HIV prevalence among the population, according to UNAIDS, amounting

to more than 5.6 million people living with HIV.

South Africa expands its capability to do battle against disease, building upon what the nation has learned receiving support from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. In 2010 alone, PEPFAR funds supported treatment for nearly 920,000 adults and children in South Africa.

Clinton also praised the progress Namibia and Rwanda have made in increasing their commitment to devote their own national resources to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, rather than relying on donor funds alone.

The U.S. secretary of state also made the point that urging partner nations to expand their responsibility for HIV/AIDS does not mean the United States is on the verge of "abandoning our partners." Rather, she said, the gradual expansion of domestic responsibility will make AIDS programs better able to sustain themselves over the long term.

Clinton said nations must be more innovative and creative in their responses to HIV/AIDS and other health care issues if they are to meet the challenge. The United States, for example, is developing a new scoring method to assess how well programs are achieving their goals on the way to "measurable progress," Clinton said.

The African Union Commission is also aiming to create a more sustainable framework for health care, according to Chairman Jean Ping, who also spoke at the UNAIDS event. He said the way forward relies on diversified financing, access to medicines and enhanced health governance, which will produce greater efficiency and stronger health systems.

"We need smart investments for more results for our people in terms of lives saved, infection avoided, keeping people alive, healthy and productive," Ping said.

Clinton praised the AU direction as "a great step forward if we are serious about shared responsibility." If the leaders present at the UNAIDS event move in that direction, she predicted, "we will accelerate our progress and move even faster toward the day when we can announce the birth of an AIDS-free generation."

World Cannot Contain Challenge of Nuclear-Armed Iran, President Obama Says

25 September 2012

Washington — President Obama says the United States "will do what we must" to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon because of the global and regional threat that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose.

"Make no mistake: A nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained," he told the United Nations General Assembly in New York September 25.

"It would threaten the elimination of Israel, the security of Gulf nations and the stability of the global economy. It risks triggering a nuclear arms race in the region, and the unraveling of the Nonproliferation Treaty," he said.

The United States respects the right of other countries to access peaceful nuclear power, but "one of the purposes of the United Nations is to see that we harness that power for peace," he said.

Iran's government has repeatedly failed to "take the opportunity to demonstrate that its nuclear program is peaceful and to meet its obligations to the United Nations," the president said.

A coalition of countries is holding Iran's leaders accountable, Obama said, and the United States "wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy, and we believe that there is still time and space to do so," but "that time is not unlimited."

He also said Iran's government restricts the right of its people, who have "a remarkable and ancient history," and that many Iranians "wish to enjoy peace and prosperity alongside their neighbors."

SYRIAN REGIME "CRIES OUT FOR PROTEST"

In remarks on Syria, Obama said Iran's leaders are propping up Bashar al-Assad's regime, and he said that Syria's future "must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people."

"If there is a cause that cries out for protest in the world today, it is a regime that tortures children and shoots rockets at apartment buildings," he said.

The Assad regime "must come to an end so that the suffering of the Syrian people can stop and a new dawn can begin," and the international community must remain engaged to help assure that "what began with citizens demanding their rights does not end in a cycle of sectarian violence."

Together, the world needs to stand with Syrians who have a vision of their country that is "united and inclusive" among all of its religious and ethnic communities, and where all "have a say in how they are governed," Obama said.

"That is what America stands for; that is the outcome that we will work for — with sanctions and consequences for those who persecute, and assistance and support for those

who work for this common good. Because we believe that the Syrians who embrace this vision will have the strength and legitimacy to lead," the president said.

Hateful Speech Does Not Excuse Violence, President Obama Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 25 September 2012

Washington — Violent unrest over recent weeks has highlighted the need for an honest dialogue as well as the need for people to choose between the forces that drive them apart on the one hand, and their common hopes for greater opportunity and security on the other, President Obama told the United Nations General Assembly.

Speaking in New York September 25, Obama thanked those around the world who have helped to secure U.S. diplomatic facilities and who have called for calm. The violence and hateful speech sparked by an anti-Islamic film do not represent the views of the overwhelming majority of Muslims "any more than the views of the people who produced this video represent those of Americans," he said.

The president described the video as "crude and disgusting" and said that its message "must be rejected by all who respect our common humanity." As a country with its own Muslim community, "we understand why people take offense to this video because millions of our citizens are among them," he said.

But in the aftermath of violence directed at American and other Western targets, he said, "there are no words that excuse the killing of innocents. There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy. There is no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan."

Responding violently to those who engage in hateful speech only allows them to create chaos. With modern technology and the ease of uploading videos, photos and other materials to share online with the world, a violent response empowers "the worst of us," he said.

As the U.S. president, "I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day, and I will always defend their right to do so," he said.

"In 2012, at a time when anyone with a cell phone can spread offensive views around the world with the click of a button, the notion that we can control the flow of information is obsolete. The question, then, is how do we respond. And on this we must agree: There is no speech that justifies mindless violence," Obama said.

The best way to combat hateful speech is not by

repression or restriction, which can quickly become a tool to silence critics and oppress minorities. "The strongest weapon ... is more speech — the voices of tolerance that rally against bigotry and blasphemy, and lift up the values of understanding and mutual respect," he said.

The president quoted South African leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nelson Mandela, saying, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

Every country has people who find the religious beliefs of others to be threatening, Obama said, but "those who love freedom for themselves must ask themselves how much they are willing to tolerate freedom for others."

In hard economic times, he said, it is tempting to rally people around perceived enemies at home and abroad instead of focusing on the hard and painstaking work of reform.

"That brand of politics — one that pits East against West, South against North, Muslims against Christians, Hindus, and Jews — cannot deliver the promise of freedom," he said. Instead it only offers false hope, and does nothing to educate a child, feed people or create jobs.

Commenting on the protests that have brought political change to Arab countries, Obama noted that "we have seen largely peaceful protests bring more change to Muslim-majority countries than a decade of violence."

Extremists "understand this," and "because they have nothing to offer to improve the lives of people, violence is their only way to stay relevant. They do not build, they only destroy," Obama said.

Around the world, "people are making their voices heard, insisting on their innate dignity and the right to determine their future," he said.

Despite the challenges of democratic transition, Obama said he remains convinced that "ultimately government of the people, by the people and for the people is more likely to bring about the stability, prosperity and individual opportunity that serve as a basis for peace in our world."

President Obama Vows to Intensify Fight Against Human Trafficking

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 25 September 2012

Washington — President Obama has promised that the U.S. government will intensify its fight against human trafficking, inside the United States and around the world.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Clinton Global

Initiative in New York September 25, the president said that more than 20 million people have been ensnared in what he called "modern slavery," which distorts markets, endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime.

"There's no denying the awful reality. When a man desperate for work finds himself in a factory or on a fishing boat or in a field working, toiling for little or no pay and beaten if he tries to escape, that is slavery. When a woman is locked in a sweatshop or trapped in a home as a domestic servant, alone and abused and incapable of leaving, that's slavery. When a little girl is sold by her impoverished family — girls my daughters' age — [or] runs away from home, or is lured by the false promise of a better life and then imprisoned in a brothel and tortured if she resists, that's slavery. It is barbaric and it is evil, and it has no place in a civilized world," he said.

President Obama described human trafficking in the United States as "the migrant worker unable to pay off the debt to his trafficker; the man lured here with the promise of a job, his documents then taken, and forced to work endless hours in a kitchen; the teenage girl, beaten, forced to work the streets."

To stop the practice in the United States, the president said, the federal government is expanding the number of agencies dealing with the issue and providing them with more resources to detect trafficking networks and strengthen protections for foreign-born workers.

"We're putting [traffickers] where they belong, behind bars," he said.

To make sure that they do not engage in trafficking, federal contractors must demonstrate compliance with a number of prohibitions against exploitive labor practices, the president said.

"In short, we're making clear that American tax dollars must never, ever be used to support the trafficking of human beings. We will have zero tolerance," he said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is creating overseas partnerships to give countries incentives to stop the practice and is calling them out when they don't, he said.

"We're partnering with groups that help women and children escape from the grip of their abusers. We're helping other countries step up their own efforts. And we're seeing results. More nations have passed and more nations are enforcing modern anti-trafficking laws," he said.

Speaking to the millions of people victimized by

trafficking around the world, the president said: "We see you. We hear you. We insist on your dignity. Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time, and the United States will continue to lead it in partnership with you."

U.S. Welcomes Philanthropists into Development Work

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 24 September 2012

Washington — The U.S. government is making it easier for private American philanthropists to play a bigger role in global development.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the U.S. government is changing its tax regulations to reduce the bureaucratic expenses that American charities face when they give grants to foreign civil-society groups.

"Under current U.S. tax rules, every time you give a grant to a foreign civil-society organization, you have to prove that the organization would qualify as a tax-exempt one if it operated in our own country. And that process ... can cost as much as \$10,000 in legal fees," Clinton said in New York September 24.

Under the new rules, that legal fee will come down to about \$200, freeing up thousands of dollars to be used for development work, Clinton said as she launched the State Department's Global Philanthropy Working Group.

A second way that the United States is expanding philanthropy is by encouraging what she called "the ecosystem for philanthropy overseas."

"Many societies do not have such a tradition, and some governments actually have policies that discourage philanthropy," Clinton said. Two of the richest men in the United States, Warren Buffet and Bill Gates, are encouraging billionaires around the world to start thinking of themselves as philanthropists.

Expanding philanthropy is one of several changes that are occurring in U.S. development policy, according to Clinton. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative, run by her husband, former President Bill Clinton, the secretary said the private sector is another potent force for development. "You cannot have development in today's world without partnering with the private sector," she said.

But for the private sector to have a positive impact, the governments of developing countries need to make internal reforms that provide safety for foreign investment, Clinton said. She added that the U.S. government has blunt conversations with the leaders of developing countries, confronting them about corruption.

She related a conversation she had a few days ago with the president of a country that is trying to tackle corruption.

"I said, 'Well, I have here a lot of the international lists of where your country stands on business climate, on corruption, on government transparency, and you are near or at the bottom. It is time for you to recognize that in an interconnected global economy, you will benefit from doing what you should be doing internally for yourself,'" Clinton said, adding that she has this kind of conversation on a regular basis.

The secretary said the ways that the U.S. government delivers development assistance have changed over the course of recent decades, but the fundamental values of advancing freedom, prosperity and human dignity have not.

U.S., Global Partners Launch Effort to Empower Women

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 24 September 2012

Washington — The United States is joining with 12 international partners to launch a new effort aimed at expanding women's political and economic participation around the world.

The Equal Futures Partnership "builds on much of the work that has gone on over the last several years to grow women's participation in all sectors, recognizing that no country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind," said Melanne Verveer, the State Department's ambassador-at-large for global women's issues.

She spoke in New York September 24 to preview the launch, scheduled to take place later that day.

"There is a mountain of data, research, evidence of all kinds that shows what women's economic participation does both in the workplace and as entrepreneurs in growing economies and creating jobs," Verveer said. "We also know what a difference political participation makes in bringing perspectives and experiences to public policy that can have tremendously positive outcomes."

She said the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report, which examines the gap between men and women in a given country based on education, health, economic participation and political participation, shows that countries with smaller gender disparities are far more prosperous and economically competitive than those with larger disparities.

Verveer commended recent progress to close the gap in education and health accessibility, but said economic and political participation still have a way to go.

The new partnership, she said, aims to make an “ongoing difference” in women’s participation in these areas in countries around the world.

The Equal Futures Partnership responds to a challenge President Obama issued to his fellow leaders during the 2011 United Nations General Assembly to address key barriers to women’s empowerment around the world.

The partnership brings together the United States with 12 other founding partners: Australia, Benin, Bangladesh, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, Jordan, the Netherlands, Peru, Senegal, Tunisia and the European Union.

Latvia, Italy, Thailand and Belgium have expressed their desire to participate in the next phase of the partnership’s efforts, which will be announced in April at the World Bank meetings in Washington.

Private corporations have also joined in making international commitments, including Intel, Discovery Communications, Mary Kay and Goldman Sachs. Additionally, the World Bank and United Nations Women have committed to partner in the effort, agreeing to house best practices and support the implementation of countries’ pledges.

The partnership’s launch is scheduled to take place on the sidelines of the 2012 U.N. General Assembly in New York.

World Bank Supports Global Agriculture As Food Prices Spike

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 24 September 2012

Washington — The World Bank has increased its support for global agriculture to its highest level in 20 years and has pledged to continue helping countries respond to recent food price hikes, says World Bank President Jim Yong Kim.

The commitment came in response to the World Bank’s latest Food Price Watch report, which showed global food prices soaring this summer due to droughts and high temperatures in both the United States and Eastern Europe.

Prices from June to July rose by 10 percent, as maize and wheat each rose by 25 percent and soybeans went up by 17 percent. Overall, the World Bank’s Food Price Index, which tracks the prices of internationally traded food commodities, was 6 percent higher in July than at the same point last year.

The World Bank has observed a pattern of food price volatility during the past year, and the latest report confirmed that price changes remain hard to predict. It showed food prices increased in April and dropped in

May and June before rising sharply again in July.

“We cannot allow these historic price hikes to turn into a lifetime of perils as families take their children out of school and eat less nutritious food to compensate for the high prices,” Kim said following the report’s August 30 release.

He said the World Bank’s support for agriculture in the 2012 fiscal year was more than \$9 billion — a level not reached during the past two decades. The organization is coordinating closely with United Nations agencies through the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, as well as with nongovernmental organizations, to improve food-market transparency and to help governments make informed responses to global food price spikes.

According to Food Price Watch, prices are expected to remain high and volatile in the long run as a consequence of increasing supply uncertainties, higher demand from a growing population, and the low responsiveness of the food system.

“Should the current situation escalate, the World Bank Group stands ready to go even further to assist client countries protect the most vulnerable against future shocks,” an August 30 World Bank statement said. “Measures can include increased agriculture and agriculture-related investment, policy advice, fast-track financing, support for safety nets, the multi-donor Global Agriculture Food Security Program and risk management products.”

The World Bank added that it is also pursuing programs to help mitigate food price hikes through safety nets to ensure families everywhere can afford basic supplies, sustained investments in agriculture, the introduction of drought-resistant crop varieties and keeping international trade open to the export and import of food.

Violence Is Unacceptable, President Obama Says of Protests

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 21 September 2012

Washington — The anti-Muslim video that has generated protests in several countries does not represent U.S. views of Islam, and the violence that has accompanied many of those protests is unacceptable, President Obama said.

In remarks at a town hall meeting in Miami September 20, the president said some extremists have used the natural protests that arose over the film as an excuse to carry out “inexcusable violent acts” against Westerners or Americans.

“Although we had nothing to do with the video, we find

it offensive, it's not representative of America's views, how we treat each other with respect when it comes to their religious beliefs, but we will not tolerate violence," Obama said.

Despite incidents targeting Americans, including the September 11 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other U.S. diplomats, the president said the United States must and will remain engaged in the Middle East.

"The one thing we can't do is withdraw from the region because the United States continues to be the one indispensable nation. And even countries where the United States is criticized, they still want our leadership and they still look to us to make sure that we're providing opportunity and peace," he said.

There is a "larger issue" beyond the current protests, he said, which is the transition of Arab countries from dictatorship to democracy, and "we cannot replace the tyranny of a dictator with the tyranny of a mob."

Obama said he has spoken with the presidents of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and other countries, saying, "We want to be a partner with you, we will work with you, and we stand on the side of democracy."

But he said he also told them, "Democracy is not just an election; it's also, are you looking out for minority rights, are you respecting freedom of speech, are you treating women fairly."

U.S. Seeks Greater Engagement at 67th U.N. General Assembly

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 21 September 2012

Washington — For U.S. officials, the opening of the 67th United Nations General Assembly this week presents an important opportunity for President Obama to meet with other heads of state and address the international community as a whole, and it provides a prime forum for diplomatic discussions on the world's most pressing issues.

Private citizens and students from around the world will also be taking part in what Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Esther Brimmer says will be a large international discussion in and around the U.N. headquarters in New York.

"This is a chance for a global conversation, and the United States is pleased to participate," Brimmer said in a September 20 interview.

Among the items on the agenda will be the fight against poverty, which will include looking beyond the

Millennium Development Goals that are targeted for completion in 2015. The goals, set in 2000, include expanding the number of children in primary school, making safe drinking water more accessible, and improving the health of mothers and infants.

"One of the first decisions President Obama took was to say that the Millennium Development Goals are America's goals and to actually help realign our work on development assistance in support of this global effort," Brimmer said.

She said that, along with building on the progress that has been made, the United States wants to actively work with other countries and through international forums to address development issues beyond 2015.

"That will help millions and millions of people have a better life because of the continued concerted efforts to reduce poverty worldwide," she said.

U.S. SEEKS TO REMAIN ON HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The United States also hopes to be re-elected to a second three-year term on the U.N.'s Human Rights Council. Brimmer said the council is "the most important part of the United Nations working on human rights issues," and through it the United States seeks to support the freedoms enshrined by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which countries around the world have pledged to respect.

She said the U.S. participation in the Human Rights Council over the past three years has helped the council "become a more active body" and "more relevant to current crises."

Other countries have joined the U.S. call for the council to become more agile and less singularly focused on Israel. Over the past three years it has been more useful to the international community, she said.

For example, Brimmer noted that African states asked the Human Rights Council to respond to the 2010-2011 crisis in Côte d'Ivoire when outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo would not respect election results and the country saw clashes that left an estimated 3,000 people dead.

The African states "led the effort" to go to the Human Rights Council to argue that the rights of the Ivoirians were being denied and for the council to create a commission of inquiry, she said.

There have also been three special council sessions on Syria to discuss the government's brutal repression of the Syrian people. Brimmer said the Arab League and others

"have been at the forefront of raising these crucial issues of human rights at the time that they are current."

With more countries emerging to take on regional and global leadership roles, Brimmer said it is "an exciting time to be watching international affairs," and that the United States sees their rise as a positive development.

"The United States welcomes countries that want to play a responsible role internationally, and we are seeing countries that are more active in regional organizations or active in the U.N., or that are becoming donors to other countries," she said.

Asked about the possibility of expanding the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, Brimmer said President Obama has said the United States envisions the council's modest growth. But the Security Council needs to remain effective since it is "an essential part of international peace and security," and that can be done by keeping the number of permanent members relatively small and not having those seats allocated by region, she said.

She noted that the Security Council "is busier than it has ever been before," with a more active schedule, more frequent meetings and more resolutions that are being passed at a greater rate than ever.

Aspiring Security Council members need to realize "it is a commitment for decades," and must be willing to take on responsibilities such as having "an important commitment to international peace and security" and by having "formal views on a lot of the issues and by definition the most difficult issues in the world," since the items on the Security Council's agenda have not been able to be solved either internally or regionally, Brimmer said.

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